1928 Dawn of a New Era

The old man possessed a formidable mind —which was not surprising, really. As a member of the First Generation, he had endured the darkest era of humanity, facing countless dreadful ordeals and overcoming them with great tenacity and determination.

The fact that he had lived to his respectable age was proof enough of just how much willpower he possessed.

However, today, the old man encountered an ordeal that he would not be able to overcome...

It was Cassie.

Kneeling near the bloodied prisoner, she pulled off her blindfold and looked him into the eyes — of course, Cassie's had marked him already, so what she actually saw was herself.

The old man smiled darkly, and finally spoke.

"Song of the Fallen. I've heard about you."

She responded quietly:

"And I you, Master Orum."

She knew that he might attempt to commit suicide if given enough time — in fact, he would have done so already if the nature of her Aspect had not been a closely guarded secret. So, there was little time to waste, especially considering that there were several other captured spies she would have to interrogate later.

But this one... this one was more valuable to Cassie, because he had lived a long life, and would know many secrets that had nothing to do with the clandestine side of the Domain War.

Looking into the man's eyes, Cassie activated her Transcendent Ability.

Master Orum's formidable mental defences crumbled easily under her tyrannical attack...

After that, Sunny experienced something very strange. He was reliving Cassie's memory, who in turn was reliving the memories of the old man. If anything, it was a relief, since Master Orum was very much human — his point of view was infinitely less crushing than her own.

The recent memories were the easiest to access. The fear, the pain, the despair of being caught... but below it all, an eerie sense of calm and cold determination, as if he had been prepared to meet such an end all along.

Deeper than these fresh experiences were the memories of the war. The span of time was too great, and Master Orum's memory was not much different from a mundane human, many details of his recent past already erased by the passage of time — Cassie somehow sifted through the vast volume of random recollections, zeroing in on only the most important ones.

She completed the royal order with relative ease, finding the details of Orum's clandestine activity. How long he had been relaying information to Song, what methods he used, which secrets he had shared, who were his contacts in the Sword Army... and so on.

It was eerie and frightening, how easily she had learned his most precious secrets, and how helpless the stalwart old man was in front of her.

However, even after learning everything the King of Swords wanted to know, Cassie showed no sign of having achieved her goal. Instead, she kept looking into Orum's eyes, diving deeper into his memories... deeper, deeper, and deeper still, until his whole life was laid open in front of her like a book.

There were too many pages in that book to read them all, but some were more solid and important than others. They were his core memories, as well as those memories that had just got stuck in his mind for one reason or another, sometimes for no reason at all.

Even there were too numerous for her to fathom in a short span of time, without revealing her secret actions to the onlookers. So, Cassie focused even more, her mind spinning on all cylinders to find the pieces of precious information she desperately wanted to know.

And there, finally... she discovered something.

In the next moment, Sunny was transported into an old, old memory. Despite its age, however, it was incredibly sharp and vivid, hinting at how important these events were to Master Orum.

And only a few seconds later, Sunny understood why.

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The city was on fire, and acrid smoke shrouded the streets. Military vehicles lay on the melting asphalt like corpses of metallic beasts, their armor bent and torn to shreds. Here and there, human corpses were sprawled on the ground, as well, gruesomely mutilated and surrounded by pools of blood and.

Screams of terror were echoing in the smoke, drowning in the inhuman cacophony of bestial roars.

"Orie! Orie!"

Orum — a slender young man on the cusp of adulthood — had been running for his life, overcome by pain and despair. At the sound of a childish voice calling out to him, however, he stopped and turned around.

His little sister, whom he had been dragging along, was sprawled on the ground a dozen meters away, having fallen a few moments ago.

For a moment, cold fear flooded his mind.

He... he had not even noticed when her hand slipped out of his.

Limping back in a hurry, he picked her up from the ground and wiped tears out of her eyes.

"It's alright. It's alright. Come one, with have to..."

At that moment, a hideous figure lunged at them from the smoke, frenzied madness burning in its terrifying eyes.

It was one of the infected... or whatever these demons were.

Orum froze.

...Luckily, his body moved even if his mind was paralyzed. It pushed his sister back and whipped an arm forward — a senseless gesture, considering how powerful and unstoppable the infected were.

However, Orum had been one of these infected not too long ago.

He had not turned into a monster, though. Instead, he had dreamed of a terrible place, fighting for his life in a dreadful land where gods and demons were real, and humans possessed unbelievable powers. When he awoke, he brought parts of that dream with him.

As the infected was about to tear into his flesh, the asphalt beneath it suddenly parted, and then closed like stone jaws, crushing the creature's bones and trapping it.

Orum fell back, trembling, and pulled a military handgun — the one he had picked up from a soldier's corpse a few minutes before — from the pocket of his torn jacket.

Aiming it at the infected, he disengaged the safety and repeatedly pulled the trigger.

His aim was so bad that only seven rounds out of twelve actually hit the monster despite the close distance. Out of those, three had ricocheted off the creature's adamantine skull... but the remaining four were mercifully enough to kill it.

The infected slumped, and Orum shuddered when a ghostly voice resounded in his head:

[You have slain a Dormant Beast, Carrion Beast.]

[You have received a Memory.]

Lowering the empty gun, Orum belatedly realized that he had forgotten to search for spare magazines on the soldier's corpse. He had no bullets left.

How were they going to survive?

How... how was anyone going to survive?

All around young Orum and his sister...

The world was coming to an end.